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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to assess the distribution of male vs. female occupational portrayals in terms of occupational prestige on the six television shows most frequently mentioned by preschool children. The following shows were viewed and analyzed six times: Sesame Street, Bugs Bunny, Roadrunner, Batman, Flintstones, and Happy Days. Occupational prestige categories were measured on Duncan's Socio-Economic Index of the North-Hatt Scale. The results indicate that: (1) men outnumber women in all occupational prestige categories, with six males to every female; (2) on educational shows (Sesame Street) men outnumber females in all occupational prestige categories, with seven males to every female; (3) no women are portrayed in the high level (85-100) occupational prestige category on any of the six most frequently mentioned shows; (4) men outnumber women in all other levels of occupational prestige: medium level (70-84), ten to one; low level (55-69), four to one; below 54, twenty-seven to one. These findings indicate that women are portrayed in inferior occupational roles and in proportions not representing real world numbers. It is concluded that television as a source of incidental learning offers the preschool child a male dominated picture of the occupational world. (Author/SS)

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OCCUPATIONAL PORTRAYAL OF MEN AND WOMEN ON THE MOST FREQUENTLY MENTIONED TELEVISION SHOWS OF PRESCHOOL CHILDREN

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OCCUPATIONAL PORTRAYAL OF MEN AND WOMEN ON THE MOST FREQUENTLY MENTIONED TELEVISION SHOWS OF PRESCHOOL CHILDREN

Television is a major medium of cultural communication in the decade of the 70's. The television set can be found in over 97.5% of American homes (Nielsen et al, 1975) turned on daily for six hours and forty-nine minutes (Broadcasting Yearbook, 1975). Children begin to view television on a consistent basis at about 2½ years of age (Lyle and Hoffman, 1972) and average viewing hours for the preschool child (age 3-5 years) is 21 hours a week (Barcus, 1973; Stein and Friedrich, 1972). Children, by the completion of high school, spend 11,000-12,000 hours in school and 22,000 hours watching television (Looney, 1971).

Socialization concerning occupational roles occurs largely through accidental or haphazard exposure to a variety of learning sources. The mass media play a significant part in socialization since television has been successful in teaching specific skills and in incidental learning (De Fleur, 1964). Schramm (1961) states that "the viewer goes to television for entertainment and stores up certain information without seeking it" (p. 75).

Television's Portrayal of Men and Women in Occupational Roles

De Fleur (1964) has found that television as a source of incidental learning presents the younger viewer with a concentration of occupations related to the law, the preoccupation with upper-status jobs, the infrequent representations of ordinary work roles and an imbalance of the sexes. The young child views the world of work through television's distortion and presentation of erroneous conceptions about occupations. De Fleur and De Fleur (1967) have found that the six-year-old has acquired definite ideas about occupational roles and the social rankings among such roles. Research has found that the more a child views television, the more likely he will select a stereotyped occupational choice (Beuf, 1974).

Studies of media presentation have found television women not being presented in proportions approximating any degree of real world representation (Sternglanz & Serbin, 1974) and often in relegated roles (Miles, 1975; Kaniuga et al, 1974; Ramsdell, 1973; Mills, 1974).

Research has noted that children are interested in television characters as a source of conversation (Lyle and Hoffman, 1972), as models for solution of problems (Meyer, 1973), and for identification with same sex characters (Sprafkin, 1975).

Research (Shechtman, 1978) has found data indicating the relationship of career awareness and television for preschool children. The major findings report the following:

1. Ninety-five percent of the children named an occupational choice for adulthood.

2. There was a strong relationship between the occupational choice prestige levels of boys and girls with the occupational prestige level of their favorite television character's occupation.

3. Teachers were more aware of the occupational choice of boys than girls in their classrooms.

4. Boys named 21 occupations as compared to 14 chosen by the girls. Girls more often chose a parent role as an occupation than boys, that is, wanting to grow up to be a "mommy".

5. There was a tendency toward a little and moderate relationship between occupational choice prestige level of some boys and girls with their same sex parent.

6. There were stronger correlations between the occupational prestige levels of boys and girls with their favorite television character than with their same sex parent.

Shechtman (1978) found that preschool children 3-5 years of age more frequently mentioned the following shows as their favorite:

1. Batman
2. Bugs Bunny
3. Sesame Street
4. Flintstones
5. Happy Days
6. Roadrunner

Procedures

This study assessed the distribution of male/female occupational portrayals on the six most frequently mentioned shows by viewing the shows six times. Occupational role was defined as a social position in which a television performer was seen in a distinguishable occupation (Seggar and Wheeler, 1973). The shows were observed in April-May, 1977.

Occupations were divided into four ranges of occupational prestige by using Duncan's Socio-Economic Index (Hall, 1969) of the North-Hatt Scale. In order to explore patterns of distribution of occupational portrayals, occupations were divided into four ranges of occupational prestige. The four groups were:

1. High, 85-100 (e.g. inventor, doctor)
2. Medium, 70-84 (e.g. athlete, teacher)
3. Low, 55-69 (e.g. crane operator, singer)
4. Below 54 (e.g. laborer, lumberjack)

FIGURE 1

	85-100		70-84		55-69		Below 54	
	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females
Sesame Street	4	0	44	4	68	15	24	2
Bugs Bunny	3	0	25	2	29	6	11	0
Roadrunner	2	0	30	1	44	1	12	0
Batman	1	0	13	1	28	3	0	0
Flintstones	1	0	55	4	58	21	7	0
Happy Days	0	0	5	4	17	14	0	0
TOTAL	11	0	172	16	244	60	54	2

Major Findings

1. Men outnumber women in all occupational prestige categories with six males to every female.

2. On educational shows (Sesame Street) men outnumber females in all occupational prestige categories with seven males to every female.

3. No women were portrayed in the high level (85-100) occupational prestige category on any of the six most frequently mentioned shows.

4. Men outnumber women in the medium level (70-84) occupational prestige category with ten males to every female.

5. Men outnumber women in the low level (55-69) occupational prestige category with four males to every female.

6. Men outnumber women in Below 54 level occupational prestige category with twenty-seven males to every female.

Conclusions

The results of this study tends to support research indicating that women are portrayed in relegated occupational roles and in proportions not representing real world numbers. Television as a source of incidental learning offers the preschool child a male dominated picture of the occupational world. The findings may be related to research indicating a strong relationship between the occupational choice prestige levels of boys and girls with the occupational prestige level of their favorite character's occupation (Shechtman, 1978).

What Can A Teacher Do?

Television is a daily experience for most preschoolers. These viewers select all types of programs and do name favorite characters on these shows. This study indicates that the shows preschoolers watch portray men and women in unequal numbers and different occupations. The six shows studied model women in fewer occupational roles in every category of occupational prestige.

The television occupational portrayals are important to teachers who are concerned with career awareness. To the degree young children view television they may be influenced in their attitudes to occupations available or appropriate for their own sex and the opposite sex. For example, young girls may believe that women should choose certain type occupations since these "stereotyped" and limited number of careers are modeled by their "Third Parent" (Fuller et al, 1970).

A teacher concerned with the possible influence of occupational role portrayal may attempt some of the following:

1. Watch your students' favorite shows to know if a non-sexist curriculum should be implemented to counter television viewing effects.

2. Develop a career awareness component for your classroom. Gather non-sexist books, materials, and obtain real people in alternative work roles to visit the class.

3. Organize your parent group to begin to analyze parental values toward career awareness and television viewing. Some parents want your support in turning off the tube.

4. Organize a letter writing campaign to advertisers and stations concerning the models young children view. Join ACT and become involved in the concern about television.

5. Begin using favorite characters as a source of teaching. For example, Fred and Wilma Flintstone can be used to act out a story (children can develop plot), lead the children in counting objects, sing songs, etc.

6. Encourage children to talk about the characters they view. This may indicate to you how important television is to the children you teach.

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